Raising Our Future Generations

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In the Name of Allâh, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

Contents

(Part 1) A Great Responsibility

No doubt, as concerned parents, we are all worried about how our kids will turn out. More and more I have parents coming and asking for tips on raising their children. In the next few articles, we will speak about some important issues regarding the raising of our children. Inshaa Allaah, we'll try to be as practical as possible, but bear in mind that as parents we need to be willing to admit to our shortcomings and not discount that which is "inconvenient" as being impractical. I am writing as a parent who faces the same challenges as all of you. I too am living in the West (and as a matter of fact was raised here) so it's not as though I am "out of touch" with what is really out there.

Let me begin by reminding one and all of what a great responsibility raising children really is. Realizing this should drive us to making a greater effort. Responsibility is a word many like to avoid, but we simply cannot. Islaam teaches us responsibility. In the following ahaadeeth the Messenger of Allaah (sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) draws our attention to the great responsibility of bringing our children up correctly.

Ibn 'Umar (radiyallaahu 'anhu) reports that he heard the Messenger of Allaah (sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) say: "**All of you are (like) shepherds and all of you will be asked about their flock (i.e. are responsible for them). The Imam (leader) is the shepherd of his subjects and he is responsible. A man is the shepherd for the people of his home and he is responsible (will be asked about them). A woman is the shepherd of the home of her husband and she is responsible. Each of you is (like) a shepherd and each is responsible for his flock."** *Agreed upon*

Furthermore, the Prophet (sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) more or less states that a child will grow up on the religion/way (deen) of his parents as they are the strongest influences over him. Al-Bukhaari reports from the hadeeth of Abu Hurayrah (radiyallaahu 'anhu) that the Prophet (sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) said: "**There is no child born except in the state of fitrah (pristine disposition, natural state of Islaam) then his parents make him Jewish or Christian or Magian. Likewise, the animal gives birth to a fully formed calf. Do you see in it the least disfigurement?"** Then Abu Huraryrah recited (what means): "***The fitrah of Allaah upon which He has created [all] people."*** [30:30]

Allaah has ordered parents to raise their children well and placed this huge responsibility on their shoulders for He says (what means): "***O you who have believed, protect yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones, over which are [appointed] angels, harsh and severe; they do not disobey Allaah in what He commands them but do what they are commanded."*** [66:6]

'Ali (radiyallaahu 'anhu) said regarding the (meaning of the) words of Allaah: "*protect yourselves and your families from a Fire*" that it means teach yourselves and your families good. Al Fakhr ar-Raazi said in his tafseer that it means protect yourselves by abstaining from what Allaah has forbidden. Others said it means to protect yourselves by abandoning sin and working righteousness and to hold your families accountable as you hold yourselves accountable.

Clearly then, a great deal of effort is required and the process of correcting and training is an ongoing one. Always keep in mind that you, the parent, will be asked about your child(ren). Ibn al Qayyim (rahimahullaah) says that the father will be asked about his child before the child is asked about his

father. So for a parent to neglect teaching their child(ren) that which is beneficial is indeed a great wrong. Most children are corrupted due to their parents' shortcomings in raising them well (and neglect in teaching them their religious responsibilities and duties).

O parent, understand well that raising your child upon the true religion (al Islaam) in accordance with the Quraan and Sunnah is your duty and the right of the child; it is not a favour you extend to the child! Allaah will ask you about how you raised your child and what you taught him. Therefore, keep this in the forefront of your mind always. Ask yourself, when I am brought before my Lord on that inevitable Day and asked about my child, what will my response be?

In the following articles, we will seek to raise points and offer practical solutions to implement regarding the raising of our children; so that inshaa Allah, on that great Day, we will have an answer to Allaah's questions which we will not regret.

(Part 2) Start At The Beginning

Although I don't want to spend too much time on this (as I believe it should be well known to us already), it is still necessary that we be reminded of the fact that spousal selection and du'aa (supplication) are extremely important. One of the aims of marriage is to produce children. Therefore, when intending marriage one needs to be extremely careful in selecting a suitable spouse. Not only is this person to be your life partner and soul mate, but he/she will be a parent to your child. That is why the Prophet (*sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) guided men to selecting righteous women for wives and women to selecting righteous men as husbands. Clearly, one who has good religious commitment (piety/righteousness) will better understand the responsibility that lies on their shoulders and will strive to fulfill the duty of parenthood in a manner that pleases Allaah. A home built on *taqwaa* (piety) is the best home.

As for du'aa, then this should go without saying. One needs to regularly turn to Allaah and beg of His assistance. After all, He is the Creator of all things and manages/controls them. It therefore makes sense to ask Him to assist us in finding an appropriate spouse and granting us the ability to raise our children in a manner that pleases Him. As well, the man needs to say the du'aa prescribed by the Prophet (sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) at the time of having intimate relations with his wife. What a wonderful start it is when Allaah is implored!

After the child is born, parents should try to follow the sunnah carefully in the hope that Allaah will bless the child and protect him from (all) harm. Amongst the sunnah acts is to call the *athaan* in the right ear of the child (although this may be debated), doing *tahneek* (chewing a piece of date and then taking the saliva on the finger and rubbing it in the infant's mouth), giving the child a good name, circumcising the child and doing the 'aqeeqah (sacrificing a sheep for a girl and two for a boy). The fact that the Prophet (sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) prescribed such things for us should be sufficient to make us want to do them. Rest assured, following the sunnah will bring only good.

Children are like sponges and I am certain that they pick things up from the very first days of their lives. Imagine, experiments have shown that a child is affected by certain things even before birth, so what about after birth?! Therefore, parents should be on their best behaviour from the outset. They must be regular with their (five daily) prayers, avoid foul language, remember Allaah regularly, recite Quraan and surround their child with a healthy environment overall. Note here that I am not speaking of dressing the child well and feeding them well and so forth. Not that these are not important matters, but it appears to me that most are paying attention to those matters already and the neglect is mostly in religious and moral training.

In what follows, we'll look at how we can be proactive in instilling good habits and manners in our children from a very early age, and also the love for Allaah and this deen.

(Part 3) Shifting Gears

Birth to Age Two

As our children develop and grow, we see many changes in them. One of the first things I recall noticing in my kids was their imitation of Mom and Dad. They like to copy what we do. More specifically for me, I recall being in salaah while sitting for tashah-hud; my daughter happened to be next to me and from the side of my eye I noticed her moving the index finger of both hands. *Subhaanallaah!* I was amazed at how a young child of barely two years picked up on and wanted to imitate even this small detail of the salaah. My son on the other hand imitated me while pretending to talk on the phone; he would pace back and forth with one hand in his pocket and the other on his shoulder (making as though he was carrying a phone). Realizing this should be enough to drive us towards being the best role models for our children.

As children approach two years of age we see that they pick up a great deal from their surroundings. It

is therefore crucial that their parents are there for them. It is sad to see in this day and age that so many of our sisters place more importance on "a career" than they do on the family. In reality, the man and woman have very clear roles within an Islaamic household and the day we chose to ignore those roles, we began seeing a change in our children.

The woman has to acknowledge that Allaah has placed in her qualities that render her best suited to provide the child nurturing and tender loving care. In the real world we see that generally speaking, women are much more gentle, loving, patient and able to provide young children their basic needs. Not to say that men are incapable, but women just do this much better (while husbands assist). Thus, the best career a woman can have is in her very own home; raising our future leaders, bread winners, mujaahideen, scholars, mothers and teachers. It's a career far more demanding than any I am aware of and one that potentially brings eternal rewards and satisfaction. It is the mother who perhaps has the greatest influence on her child in the first years. Therefore, I advise my sisters to strive hard and fulfill this role to the best of their ability.

Mother and father both have to work hand in hand in setting good examples for their children and protecting them from harm from an early age. Besides being on our best behaviour, we now also have to be proactive in practically teaching them right from wrong, manners/etiquettes and steering them away from immorality. Let me give a few simple examples here:

- Say you are in the mall or outside somewhere and you happen to see a homosexual "couple" kissing. Do you just walk past as though nothing happened? Absolutely not! Rather, turn your child's face away as you too look away and show through your body language, facial expressions and words how disgusted you are by that sight. When the child sees this from you, he'll grow up knowing this is filthy, unacceptable and deviant behaviour.
- When your child asks you for something, rather than simply giving it to them, first teach them to say please. Then when they get what they requested teach them to say thank you, or better still jazaakallaahu khayran. When we do this repeatedly, our children will begin doing it automatically Inshaa Allaah. This of course is in addition to us practicing what we preach!
- Perhaps you are looking out the window and it's "Halloween" time and you see a neighbour's child walking out in a costume. What do you do? Watch that child and talk about what a nice costume he/she is wearing? I certainly hope not. Instead, talk to your child (yes, even at age 2) and tell them how this is bad and evil and from the way of Shaytaan.

Islaamic manners and etiquettes can be taught from a very early age. Before feeding the child, always say **bismillah** audibly, then **alhamdulillaah** when they're done; say **alhamdulillaah** audibly when you sneeze in front of the child and when they sneeze try to make them say it too; say **maashaa Allaah** when they do something good, say the du'aa for leaving and reentering the home audibly, say the du'aa for entering the vehicle audibly and so forth. You will be amazed how they pick up bits and pieces of each du'aa from this early age. Parents actually notice how kids learn jingles from certain ads at a very young age. Therefore, if you expose them to these beautiful words, they will pick them up instead of something totally useless.

Kids like to play with other kids and so now you will naturally want to find friends for your children. This is normal and you should do so. However, don't think that because they're so young, it does not matter whom they befriend. Rather, from a young age make certain that they have Muslim friends. Indeed, we live amongst non-Muslims and have to interact with them, but that does not mean we take them as close friends. This is from the basic teachings of Islaam.

The Prophet (*salllallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) informed us that a person is upon the *deen* (religion, way) of his close friend, so we should be cautious as to whom we take as close friends. Therefore, look for children from **good** Muslim homes whom your kids can befriend and spend time with. Whether you like it or not, kids will pick things up from one another (we clearly observe this) and thus you do not want your kids to be with others from whom they will learn bad habits. Too often I see kids behaving badly and using obscene language and it is clear where they picked this up from. As for playing with non-Muslim kids at the park and so forth for a short period of time under your supervision, then Inshaa Allaah that should be fine. However, if you see or hear anything which raises concerns, address it immediately.

As the days go by, the responsibility and challenges become greater. I am well aware that trying to raise good Muslim kids in this society is exceedingly difficult, but we have no choice but to stand up to the challenge. As long as we live here, we have no choice but to deal with the many challenges that may not be present in Muslim lands. Next time, we'll look at how to continue after age two *Inshaa Allaah*.

(Part 4) A Solid Foundation

Ages Two to Five

By the time your child is two years of age, he/she is likely speaking or beginning to speak a great deal. In addition, they will begin understanding things much more than prior to this time. Obviously, the older they get, the better their understanding and the more their questions will be. It is important that

parents communicate with their children; make sure to listen, talk to them and address their questions.

I cannot emphasize enough how one needs to lead/teach by example. So besides practicing what you preach, be sure to teach the child du'aas in the manner we previously discussed. However, you now need to step things up a notch. Start teaching them our *'aqeedah* (belief system) in a slightly more "formal" way. For example, when you see beautiful trees, ask your child, "Who made these?" The same with the sky, the mountains etc… When it snows or rains, ask the child who caused it to snow and rain and so forth. When eating, ask who provided us with the food and make them understand why we say bismillaah and alhamdulillaah when we begin eating and finish eating respectively. If you teach your child these matters from an early age, you are providing them with a solid foundation.

When you find that your child is learning to read, make it a priority to teach them the Arabic alphabet along with the alphabet of the language they use in their daily lives. Don't think it is overburdening your child. Children are capable of quite a bit that we are not aware of. Just as you buy alphabet blocks and other educational materials for your child to learn English (for example), spend on materials through which they can learn to read Arabic. The primary goal behind this is of course to enable them to read Quraan. Imagine, by doing so you will receive similar rewards to what they earn every time they recite Quraan. In the event you are not able to teach your child Arabic (here I mean to read Arabic), then do your best to find them a teacher/tutor; it is one of the best investments you will ever make. In addition to teaching your child to read Quraan, do what you can to assist them in memorizing portions of it as well. Early on you can have them memorize simple soorahs; teach them *al-Faatihah*, *al-Ikhlaas* and the last few soorahs of the Quraan and slowly add to that. To help them, let them listen to these soorahs being recited on recordings; and perhaps if they hear them in childrens' voices they will be encouraged to learn more. As a matter of fact, you may find video clips on the internet of young children reciting Quraan; expose your child to these so they can be further encouraged.

Children love stories. Before they learn to read, they love being read to and told stories. Alhamdulillaah, for us English speakers, there are now many kids' books available in good and simple English that we can read to our kids and eventually have our kids read for themselves. Be keen to make these books available to your children either by purchasing them or borrowing them from your local Islaamic Library (at the Masjid, Islaamic Center or Muslim School). And here let me suggest that if these materials are not available at our mosques, centers and schools, then <u>you</u> as a concerned parent should make an effort to have these made available. Either you can purchase them and donate them to the institution or find people who will get together and do so. Don't expect those running these institutions to think of everything. As well, television and DVDs are a part of everyday life and are close to impossible to avoid. Living with that reality, look for materials prepared by Muslims for Muslims through which your child can learn matters of their deen (religion). Let me also point out here that just because books and other materials are given "Islaamic" names, they aren't necessarily appropriate nor good. Therefore, as you would do with any other book or DVD, screen it to make certain that it is acceptable for your child. In the case of Islaamic literature, look for materials which do not promote innovations and which rely on authentic sources for the subjects presented. Encourage your child to read and learn as much as they can about Islaam while instilling in them the importance of practicing what they learn.

Super heroes are a big thing for kids. They look for heroes and role models. As stated previously you, the Mom and Dad, are your child's first role model and hero. But as they grow, they look for others as well. Before they get hooked on Superman and others, teach them about the Prophets, the Sahaabah and other great Muslim personalities. Tell them true stories of bravery and heroism from the lives of these genuine heroes so they aspire to be like them. Wouldn't you rather that your child want to be like Khalid ibn al Waleed or Salahud-Din al Ayyoubi or Sumayyah or Khadijah bint Khuwaylid than Batman or a Power Ranger or Batwoman or Hanna Montana? Many of us neglect this aspect and it's high time we pay attention to it.

Once again, I must emphasize the importance of finding (good) Muslim friends for our children. Besides what we mentioned from the hikmah (wisdom) behind this in our last article, it is also a practical means of teaching our children *al Walaa wal Baraa* (loyalty and disavowal) and *al Hubb wal Bughdh fillaah* (love and hate for the sake of Allaah). From early on our children need to be made aware of who is good and who is evil, but they also need to know why. Therefore, when seeking out friends, make mention of the fact that so and so is good because they are Muslim and they love Allaah and Allaah loves them. Point out how they also read Quraan and pray Salaah whereas so and so (a non-Muslim) does not do those things. This may seem "extreme" to some, but it is far from that. It is one of the most effective ways of protecting our children from bad influences, raising them to feel they are special and that they have *'izzah* (honour). They need to be taught not to associate too closely with non Muslims, but at the same time, if they are just running around with them at the park or playing ball with them, we should not prevent this unless there is a good reason for it. From this you understand then that if you are going to allow your child to play with a non Muslim child, then make certain it is under your supervision. The intelligent know very well why I say this.

Although salaah, fasting, hijaab and such matters are not compulsory on children yet, it doesn't mean we should not teach them these matters and encourage them. From an early age you will notice your child imitating you while you pray. Show them how pleased you are with that; this may be in the form of a huge hug, a gift, or a simple thumbs up. Acknowledge what they are doing and praise them for it. The same goes for your little daughter who wants to cover up (put on hijaab) to imitate her mother; encourage it and praise that type of behavior. And regarding little girls, by the time they reach five,

you should start making certain that you dress them modestly. I'm not saying to put them in hijaab from this age, however, be selective of the clothing you dress them in. With regards to fasting, your child will want to fast with you in Ramadhaan. Don't prevent them! I hear many parents saying they fear for their child's health and that's why they discourage them from fasting. I recommend that if a child wants to do it, let them. Of course you are not going to be strict and insist that they abstain from food and drink all day; rather, when they feel hungry or thirsty and ask for something, give it to them. Likely the child will eat and say they want to fast again. Accept that and allow it as it makes the child feel good. Soon you'll notice that your child even manages to fast an entire day. At that point you'll make a big deal out of it and reward your child for the amazing achievement.

These early years are extremely important and as a parent you need to make certain that your child has a solid foundation to build upon. In our next article we'll continue looking at the child until he/she reaches ten years of age Inshaa Allaah.

(Part 5): Strengthening the Foundation

Ages 5-10

Children need a great deal of attention and parents have to realize that raising kids is a 24/7 job. Throwing them into child care just so you can relax and for whatever other excuses we come up with is truly an injustice and cop-out. I do understand that in some cases people don't have much of a choice, but for the most part we do and so I speak in these general terms. Particularly for those of us living here in the West, the vast majority of daycares are run by non-Muslims or "non-practicing" (I hate this term but use it only because the masses are familiar with it) Muslims. It is quite rare to find good daycares run by adherent Muslims who will assist us in raising pious children. Therefore, unless you have the good fortune of having one of those around, avoid sending your kids to daycare as much as possible. Unfortunately, they will be exposed to a great deal of un-Islaamic activities and beliefs and they will not be taught Islaamic manners and etiquettes. However, if they are under your watchful eye, you can instill in them all those wonderful Islaamic morals and habits; they'll pray with you, you'll be able to recite Quraan to them, teach them the du'aas (supplications) we say at certain times and so forth. Do you really think they're going to learn this from the daycares available to us? Parents, no one ever said raising kids was going to be easy!

The children are now ready to enter school. Most kids enter kindergarten at the age of five. So which school will you be sending your kid(s) to? The local Muslim/Islaamic School, the public school, a private school or the "home school"?

If there is a Muslim/Islaamic School in your area, then before sending your children with eyes closed, look into the school; find out how "Islaamic" the school is and what the (educational) standards of that school are. Sadly, many "Muslim/Islaamic" schools are very un-Islaamic and actually corrupt our kids and aid in confusing them as to their identity. Therefore, do research about the school and ask qualified people of (Islaamic) knowledge about the school before sending your child to it. If the school seems to be acceptable, send your kids to it, but remember to be an active part of your child's life and follow up on what they are learning. Communicate with the child's teacher and the school and try to get involved as a volunteer to benefit yourself and your community.

As for public school, then avoid sending your kids to such schools to the best of your ability. However, since some will find themselves in a position where they have no option but to send their kids to such schools (or circumstances are somewhat difficult), then be aware that you really need to be on top of things. From the outset let the school and teacher know that your child is Muslim and that you have certain restrictions/guidelines that need to be followed. Send this in writing and communicate it to the school verbally if need be. Inform them of things such as your child's dietary restrictions [so no sharing lunches with others and making certain that your child is not given foods/candies containing particular ingredients), the fact that they cannot take part in music and dance lessons, that they will not draw images with full facial features, that they cannot take part in any celebrations (i.e. Christmas, Halloween, Easter, Valentine's etc…) and so forth. Explain these things to your child well and on a regular basis check to see what they are learning and if they are adhering to the guidelines you laid out.

With respect to homeschooling, this is usually the best and safest option for us as Muslims living in a non-Muslim society. It isn't easy, but it sure is safe. Let me admit though that this requires a great deal of work and a strong commitment. But if we aren't willing to make sacrifices and exert the efforts for the welfare of our own kids, then for whom will we be willing to do so? This isn't the time to go into any details regarding homeschooling, but remember that you are likely not the only ones in this situation. So look at your community and you are bound to find other families who have similar concerns and perhaps you can have a group of kids home school together.

As your kids get older, you need to talk to them more and more about the importance of salaah, fasting, hijaab etc… in the life of a Muslim. Alhamdulillaah, they have seen you praying and maintaining your (religious) duties so far and thus this should not be very difficult. Let them know why they need to observe these rites and that the payoff is huge (i.e. al Jannah). Teach them the purpose of life (to worship Allaah) and what this means in our everyday lives. By the time they have reached age seven,

you need to insist that they pray regularly (even at school since in the winter months the time of Thuhr has passed by the time they return home) and by the time they reach age ten, you need to discipline them if they are negligent towards the prayers. Apply this to other duties such as fasting and hijaab as well. For those who send their children to public schools (I imagine they are the majority), remind them of this duty everyday before they go to school and ask them if they prayed as soon as they get home from school. This in and of itself will show them how important this matter is. However, if we ask about what they learned in Math and Science (and we should) first and only ask about salaah afterwards (or not at all), then this will send a wrong message to the kids. Talk to them regularly and remind them what a great thing it is that they pray while others don't. Let them know that this is part of who they are.

In terms of Islaamic studies, then if your kids are in a Muslim/Islaamic School, they are receiving instruction there (but you still need to follow up and complement what they're being taught). Homeschoolers too will receive instruction in Islaamic studies throughout the day. However, those kids who are attending public schools also need to be instructed in Islaamic studies and it is the responsibility of the parents to provide it for them. Perhaps the parents themselves can do this by finding good resources to assist them, or they may choose to send them to Islaamic studies classes being offered in the community by qualified and trustworthy individuals. Rest assured, Islaamic studies are more important that any other subject, no matter what that other subject may be.

The matter of friendships will continue to be an issue throughout the life of your child. What was said concerning it in earlier articles still applies at this stage and will continue to apply later on as well. Just be very cautious and extremely careful of whom your child befriends and who they hang out with. Help them choose friends and know who they are.

Now come the preteen years and what a challenge they can be! In the next article, we will begin discussing matters related to preteens Inshaa Allaah.

Courtesy of al Madinah Academy